

Child Nutrition (CN) Labeling Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) CN Labeling Program is a voluntary federal labeling program for the USDA Child Nutrition Programs. It provides food manufacturers the option to include a standardized food crediting statement on their product labels. The USDA must approve labels prior to use and manufacturers must have quality control procedures and inspection oversight that meet USDA requirements. All manufacturers participating in the CN Labeling Program must have a quality control program approved by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) or National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).

There is no federal requirement that manufacturers make CN labeled products or that schools and institutions participating in the USDA Child Nutrition Programs purchase foods with CN labels. Purchasing decisions are at the discretion of the local school food authority. If schools or institutions require a CN labeled product, this must be clearly stated in their local purchasing specifications.

Contents of CN Labels

A CN label statement clearly identifies the contribution of a commercial product toward the USDA meal pattern requirements, based on the USDA's evaluation of the product's formulation. Manufacturers state this contribution on their labels. CN labeling provides school nutrition programs with a warranty that the product contributes to the meal pattern requirements as printed on the label.

CN labels are available only for **main dish entrees** that contribute to the meat/meat alternates component of the meal pattern requirements. Examples include beef patties, cheese or meat pizzas, meat or cheese and bean burritos, egg rolls and breaded fish portions. The CN label will also indicate the contribution of other meal components that are part of these products. For example, CN labeled pizza may list contributions to the meat/meat alternates, grains and vegetables components and CN labeled breaded chicken nuggets may list contributions to the meat/meat alternates and grains components.

The CN label will be found on the actual product packaging and will look like the label on the right. A CN label will always contain the following:

- the CN logo, which is a distinct border;
- the meal pattern contribution statement;
- a six-digit product identification number;
- the USDA authorization; and
- the month and year of approval.

In addition to providing 1 ½ ounce equivalents of meat, this sample product contributes toward three vegetable subgroups (dark green, red/orange and other) and meets the whole grain-rich criteria.

The USDA does not allow manufacturers to place the CN label on a fact sheet or any other product information. To document a product's compliance with the meal pattern requirements, schools must have an original CN label from the product package.



Products with Noncreditable Grains

If a combination food contains grains that do not comply with the whole grain-rich criteria, the grain portion of the product is noncreditable and counted as an “extra” food. The other food components (meat/meat alternate and vegetable) are creditable. Therefore, the product is still eligible for a CN label that credits towards the meat/meat alternate and vegetable components. For example, breaded chicken patties or nuggets made with enriched flour are eligible for a CN label that credits only toward the meat/meat alternate component. The CN label must include a disclaimer, stating *“This product contains grains that are not creditable in school meal programs. Additional grains must be served to meet meal pattern requirements.”* The disclaimer must be stated directly under the CN label crediting statement not in the CN box.

Resources

Authorized Manufacturers and Labels:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/cnlabeling/authorized.htm>

CN Labeling:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/cnlabeling/default.htm>

Criteria for Whole Grain-rich Foods:

http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/deps/nutrition/nslp/crediting/WGR_Criteria.pdf

Crediting Foods (CSDE Web Page):

<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=333796>

Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/resources/foodbuyingguide.html>

Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs, appendix C:

http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/FBG_AppendixC.pdf

Meal Patterns (CSDE Web Page):

<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=333770>

Menu Planning (CSDE Web Page):

<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=333780>

Menu Planning Guide for School Meals:

<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=334320>



For more information, see the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Menu Planning Guide for School Meals](#) and [Meal Patterns](#) and [Crediting Foods](#) Web pages or contact the [school nutrition programs](#) staff in the CSDE Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457.

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